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THOUGHTS FOR THE TIMES.

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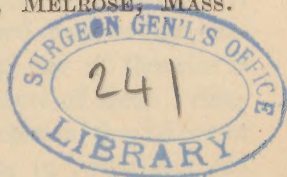
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AT

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THOUGHTS FOR THE TIMES.

An Address delivered before the Massachusetts Homœopathic Medical Society.

BY J. HEBER SMITH, M.D., MELROSE, MASS.

Gentlemen: — It is fitting that the hours set apart from ordinary duties for this annual meeting, should be occupied mainly with the interchange of the gleanings of another year's work. But I hope that you will bear with me, for the time usually allotted to this address, while I pass briefly in review some of the errors of medicine, and the prospects of its future advancement.

We have entered into the labors of the fathers, to whom descended those weighty secrets of physic, "whereby a man might preserve his body in health, or cure himself being sick"; to whom every tender floret seemed to harbor the warm influences of Venus or the martial fire of Mars, and every goodly and tall tree stood sentinel under some planetary sign, potent against witch and devil, thunder and lightning, and the cold humors and destroying fluxes of mortality. We have entered into the labors of the fathers indeed, but their works and curious devices are following them to the chambers of oblivion. They abased medicine in deifying it; in bringing it down to its proper plane, we are seeking to ennoble it. They ignored facts in the construction of pretentious theories. But the age of theories is fast passing away. We have become gleaners of facts. Simplicity and eager questioning to-day characterize the labors of the student of medicine. Nature delights in rewarding his patient, imploring search. Medicine, the oldest, though perhaps not the most changing and uncertain of the learned professions, having at length assumed the attitude of humility, there is hope for its future.

It was written by the poet Æschylus: "Time, as he grows old, teaches all things." But time has everything to teach. Some of his pupils have not, in the past, been very docile scholars;

and among them may be numbered whole generations of physicians. Hippocrates aptly compared the practice of physic to a fight, and also to a farce, acted between three persons, — the patient, the physician, and the disease. It is a mistake to look for the immediate apprehension of medicine as a science. Its phenomena are too involved; and not only is there in most cases an absence of faculty subtle enough to grasp its complex phenomena, but there is mostly an absolute unconsciousness that there are any such complex phenomena to be grasped. Our ideas have been framed out of experiences gathered within comparatively narrow areas, and with our judgments biased by preconceived notions. We have lacked that plasticity of the conceptive faculty that may enable coming generations to bring order out of confusion.

Nor will medical truths be readily adopted. Men are not unchangeable, nor do they change easily. We must remember that human nature is only changed in the slow succession of generations, by social and mental discipline. The very truths, to us so vital and paramount, that are now making such slow head against class-prejudice, may come to be viewed as so unquestionable, and even rudimentary, that the names of the elect few who established them will have passed to oblivion. Their names indeed may perish, together with whatever is false or valueless; but it is a source of reverent gratitude that not one of their thoughts pregnant with truth shall ever die. These shall live, not in monumental crypts or storied urns, but in the unquenchable and pervading brilliancy of truth, whose fires are ever consuming the dross, and revealing the form of whatever is pure, as "one of the sons of God."

Said the learned physician and courtier, Baron Stockmar: "The king complains of medicine. I can write no apology for the art, because I have learned to know the exact limits of its power." A declaration so seemingly modest would not at first be seen to embody the most absurd self-assertion. Ten years of the study of medicine in the universities of Würzburg, Erlangen, and Jena, and a few more as hospital and regimental surgeon, had qualified him, it seems, to declare that only in the

prevention of maladies can a good and great physician be really of use. But while it may be a salutary conviction that time and nature are the best allies of the physician in the treatment of physical disease, as well as of the social evils of mankind, it is painful to note the apathy with which so many eminent men have rested here, with folded arms. Nature spreads out before them a neglected field.

It is an instinct of organized life to seek remedial aid. Must this instinct, so universal, ever follow a blind search? The universal prevalence of a belief is an axiomatic argument for its truth. The ethnic religions of the world, embracing the belief in a future state and a Supreme Being, having their origin in the rudest conditions of savagery, and culminating in the liberty and strength of Christian thought, suggest that, as the litanies of nations exhibit man in search of spiritual life, so the general attention and homage paid to plants, show man in search of bodily health. Out of the depths of humanity, in its prehistoric developments, came the thought of cure; and the medicine-man, with his fantastic dress and horrid orgies, gave place to the more refined cruelties of the modern empiric.

It is not strange, in view of the absurdities of ancient medicine, and the divisions of its present disciples, that sceptics have multiplied, who assert that nature intended that the expenditure of life should be supplied by genesis alone; that she has provided man with defence against everything but disease; that death must come through the breaking down of organic tissues, and that we may not, with our drugs, triumph over him, or pluck out his sting. "For thee the field has no medicinal leaf, and the vexed ore no mineral power."

What a melancholy view is this to take of the provisions of our Mother Nature! She whom we have thought the benignant parent of things, becomes the cruel and veiled Isis, of the unmoved countenance, whose rod disposes the mournful silence of the dead.

The more complex and highly endowed a creature, the more numerous are its enemies and its resources. It must then be that man, the crowning work of creation, whose thought pierces

the hills, spans oceans, and girdles earth with sentient fire; whose foes are the elements, the unseen things of air, and the forces that balance the universe, or array themselves against him in the mimic world of a drop of water, — it must be that a being of such surpassing capabilities has been provided by the Genius of Life with the means of combating disease. The wild beast that drags his emaciated form to some mineral spring on the mountain-side, or laps the salt-lick of the plain, teaches man the lesson of cure.

In healing, we delight to see the Mind that formed nature again in operation. Healing is a natural work, as much in harmony with nature's plan as is organic reproduction. It is a law set in opposition to the unceasing forces of segregation and disintegration. It is the expression of conservation; the knot in the thread of creation.

The more complex the laws that form organic structures, the more difficult of comprehension are the forces that operate for their conservation. From this thought arises the condemnation of the former systems of medicine for their childish simplicity and puerile completeness. Let us beware of theories that cover too well the facts already known. They will be found insufficient to answer the discoveries of the future.

I come now to a statement of the underlying principle of the homœopathic school of medicine.

The French scientist, Dumont, has truly asked: "Can one imagine, in the recesses of an organ, a single cell, a single element which is not fighting for existence?" It is recognized, as one of the fundamental facts in biology, that in organic or life-structures it is inherent to resist disintegration. We, as homœopaths, recognizing this inherent stubbornness of life, seek to rouse it, in the sick, to active opposition to forces kindred to its natural enemies. By this vital opposition are overcome, in one struggle, both diseases and their kindred remedies. In the application of this principle to the treatment of the sick, as expressed in the familiar, though unsatisfactory formula, *Similia similibus curantur*, medicine advanced at once almost to the dignity of a science. From it grew, as a logical sequence,

the practice of proving drugs on the well, adding certainty to experiment, and removing half its terrors from the visitation of disease. The principle of the similars, when practically applied, necessitates the attenuation of the dose, lest the opposition aroused by the remedy be too violent, or lest the powers of the system to resist a force so kindred to the disease, be overborne and paralyzed. Perchance the truth of this law would have been more generally accepted, had it been clearly shown that the attenuation of the dose stands as a necessary corollary to the law itself.

As one unprejudiced, and made familiar by the daily use of the extremes of potencies, I would suggest that we may have carried the attenuation of the dose beyond the necessities of the case, although matter would seem to be indestructible by almost infinite division. But, in these days of materialism, we must not adopt this faith as a *Shibboleth*, or give it undue prominence. There are men whose minds are not constituted to receive it. These materialists have gone out into the wilderness of medicine to see a reed shaken by the wind. Their ear is not attuned to hear the still, small voice of nature.

The experiments conducted by M. Davaine, of Paris, with septin, upon rabbits; by injection within the veins, — reported Sept. 17, 1872, to the French Academy of Medicine, — demonstrate the power of a poison, even when diluted to the one-trillionth of a drop, to cause death in twenty-four hours. But according to this almost startling report, so confirmatory of the efficiency of infinitesimals, this was the limit of the transmissibility of septicæmia. The one-quadrillionth of a drop, from the blood of a rabbit that had died from the one-millionth of a drop, did not, in every instance, destroy life. He has thus proved that matter can be carried by the homœopathic process of attenuation above the ninth centesimal degree without ceasing to be present or losing the activity proper to it. Beyond this limit there doubtless lies a still wider reach of curative efficiency with the same poison, in cases suggestive of its use. But may there not, even in respect to its curative range, be found a limit of dilution beyond which the attenuation of a

remedial agent ceases to be advisable? The latitude of belief, and the contagious enthusiasm of a few, suggest an interrogatory form for a thought that cannot long be seriously questioned by scientific men. We must either cut away from the known laws of matter, however closely it verges on spirit, or candidly admit that there is a point of attenuation, sufficiently removed from the limit of toxication, yet requiring for its attainment the widest separation of atomic constituents, and the highest development of the specific forces of the agent that can be consistent with the susceptibility of the diseased organism; and this limit of attenuation lies doubtless in the golden mean between crudity and nothingness. It seems hardly disputable that this remove from the limit of toxication need not be very great, in the preparation of remedies for many forms of acute diseases. It was the thought of Hahnemann to attain the smallest dose that would cure, without a serious aggravation of symptoms. That the *Master* often found this dose among the highest ranges of attenuations, neither demonstrates their universal applicability, nor excuses the short-sightedness of those of his disciples who adhere to their exclusive use. Indeed, it is hardly a matter of question that this exclusive use of extreme attenuations by many of our influential physicians has deprived the profession of the fullest reward of their efforts, and the results obtained have not enabled us to recognize in such a procedure the inductive method of the natural sciences. The great law of the similars we cherish as fondly as they; but in our anxiety to hasten its general recognition, we deprecate the prominence that has been given to spiritualistic opinions and hasty deductions. We would not load our law with irons, nor seek to invest it with unreal wings.

We are guardians of a principle that must not die. Too young to protect itself, too lovely to perish, our law of cure stands by the shore of the Dead Sea of ancient medicine, like Aphrodite when she sprang from the ocean's foam, to be received by the gold-filleted Seasons, and led to the assembly of the immortals. We pledge ourselves to the advancement of this law, until the white pellet, the badge of our derision, shall

have a place in all the homes of the world, baffling the snow-wreaths of the North, keeping company with the moving tents of Arabia, and the dusky children of the tropics, the admiration of the subtle minds of Asia, and, in Greece, the long forgotten Panacea, daughter of the god of medicine. Who is able to foretell the triumphs of homœopathy in America? Light is covering the land; from the east it travels with healing in its rays.

Let us, who have so lately been charged with "practising according to an exclusive dogma," show the people our catholicity, and our eagerness to accept reform. And here let me allude to our position regarding the admission of women to membership in this Society. There is in our by-laws at present nothing for or against their membership. But I shrink from recalling your past exclusiveness or indifference. The world moves fast, and some of you have recently shown, by the most generous magnanimity, your freedom from prejudice. Woman no longer asks of man the right to heal the sick. Her future position in medicine is assured. Knocking at the outer portal of knowledge, standing in divine humility in the hall of preparation, woman waits the judgment of this century of assize. The verdict has already gone forth: "You that have waited without, pass in." The angel of the household becomes not only the cherisher of infancy, but the patroness of science, the savior of society. The subject of numberless medical experiments and surgical abuses, her hand has at last seized the scalpel, and her cunning fingers measure the currents of life. Vivified as by the touch of a spirit, medicine already begins to feel the pulses of a new life. Her quiet ministrations in the sick-room, and her intuitive observation of nature, will never merit the sarcasm of that cotemporary of Cicero, who termed the physician's watch of his patient "*the study of death.*" Let not our school of practice be slow to enlist her aid. We can never have a full and trustworthy materia medica until women, educated and refined observers, assist in the proving of drugs. Hitherto we have been fighting death single-handed. Women are, by constitution and temperament, sensitives, trembling and

vibrating to the unseen, like the magnetic needle, and as true to the polar star of duty. Only such are fitted for the highest usefulness in our profession. Let them prove their vocation by devotion to science.

The past year has been the most eventful one in the history of homœopathy in America. The animosity so long cherished by "the established school of medicine," has, in this Commonwealth, culminated in an attempt at a general expulsion of homœopaths from the Massachusetts Medical Society. We sought the protection of the Supreme Court, but have learned that its judges cannot interfere, by injunction, to correct irregularities in the pleadings, in procedure, or in the constitution of the Board of Triers. Let them proceed, if they will, with this farce, with this mediæval trial. They shall discover who is on trial at the bar of public opinion. Their "*Væ victis*" is changing to "Wo to the victors!" They begin to see a handwriting on the wall: "Another such victory and you are undone."

Who are the individuals to be tried? Gentlemen whose professional conduct has ever been worthy that honorable name. Their diplomas, stained only with time, were granted by allopathic colleges. They practised, some of them, many years according to the principles of the old school; and because they claim to have found a better way, even though planted with the thorns of fraternal hatred, they are to be held up before their fellows for censure, and the ignominious ordeal of dismissal. Thrice armed in a just cause, we raise the gauntlet of defiance that these redoubtable knights of the lancet have thrown into the arena. The battle, begun in their own asylum, under secrecy of guarded doors, shall break forth to the gaze of men. Great is truth and mighty above all things. If we have acted hitherto on the defensive, we shall no longer rest satisfied until we have stormed their strongholds, and secured their high-places of public trust and distinction.

It needs no prophet's eye to see the drift of events. Under the influence of homœopathy, old physic is throwing off its garb of senility, and its marks of decay,—like Faust trans-

formed by the draught of Mephistopheles into the strength and freshness of youth. It may never acknowledge us as disciples, or accept our law of cure under its present name. But as sure as truth is with us, the old and new schools of medicine must, in practice at least, gradually become alike. We claim for the principle of the similars, that it is the crowning law of cure, that may in time render therapeutics a science. In no other essential do the two schools differ. Recent advancement in the collateral branches of chemistry, physiology, surgery, and to a limited extent, of pathology, we accept with just appreciation, as a common good. The time is approaching when the old school must openly avow its respect for the law of cure, now observed only in the secrecy of private practice. We ask only that it may have a trial in the great public hospitals, in the tent and on the field, by educated observers.

But amid the pleasant hopes of this hour, and into this assembly of living men, comes the invisible spirit of one whose form we can never forget. He stands among us in his accustomed place, drawn hither by his devotion to truth. Above the meed of praise or the clamors of hate, he lends his influence to our deliberations. In the fullness of a well-rounded life he speaks to us, and from the cerements of death. When we met, in the autumn, to pay the last sad tribute of respect to the memory of SAMUEL GREGG, we were reminded by the sere leaf, and by that venerable and lifeless form, that we may not escape the summons of death. But as we approach the budding of spring into the fullness of a new life, let us think of our late companion as one who has conquered death, and is now developing the perfections of moral and intellectual growth. He fell as one of our leaders, great in action and counsel, in the very arena of strife. Would that the loss of such a man to the city that loved him so well, to the State of his early choice, and to his fellows, of either Society, might serve to end fraternal discord, and stay the unwarranted proceedings that embittered the last months of his life. The names of his colleagues may yet be stricken, unjustly, from the roll of the Massachusetts Medical Society; but who will answer when he is called? Of

him it can only be said, that he fell in the discharge of duty, thus relieving that honorable body of the stigma of dismissing one, who, in all the relations of life, proved himself for fifty years a gentleman and an honorable physician.

The indignity offered to medical reform has redounded to its rapid advancement in public favor. Our school of practice is, in a moral point of view, threefold stronger in this State to-day, than before the intolerant proceedings of our opponents one year ago. We care little should they at length, without the hinderance of law, carry the manifestations of bigotry to its extremest limit. Fellowship with a body of men who cling to the follies of the past, and seek to fetter knowledge, has become a questionable honor. In the light of the nineteenth century, and among a people pledged to liberty of thought, we dare them to proceed. How long, think they, will Boston, the national fountain of intellectual and moral agitation, tamely submit to the usurpation by a class of the right to administer to the sick in the retreats provided by the public funds? How long will her citizens consent to be taken from their homes, during the visitations of a pestilence, and hurried from the ministrations of homœopathic attendants to the houses of death? To what pitch of indignation must the people of Massachusetts be taxed for the maintenance of asylums for the insane, in which no one can enjoy the benefits of rational medicine, and whose doors open only inward for their wretched victims?

If we are alive to the responsibilities of the hour, let us not rest until we have brought our constituency, which represents so largely the intelligence and wealth of New England, to a proper understanding of its rights. Not for ourselves alone we stand or fall; but as the representatives of thousands, we are deputed to demand the removal of unjust preferments, not only in the medical department of State institutions, but also of the national government.

At the fair so lately held in this city, for the purpose of establishing a State homœopathic hospital, our friends proved their devotion to principle, and poured out their money like water. In every village, however remote from the exigencies of metro-

politan life, busy fingers, unused to toil, plied the needle, and art proved herself once more a handmaid of mercy. The success of that memorable enterprise has taught us what may be accomplished by organization and persistent effort.

You are familiar with the history and objects of the Homœopathic Association of Boston University. This young and promising institution, one of the principal educational enterprises of a denomination noted for its efforts in securing the education of the people, has allied itself with homœopathy. Before homœopathy was known, a follower of John Wesley stood under the Old Elm on Boston Common, and maintained "man's moral freedom and his capability of God," before an enraged mob, set on to acts of violence by the representatives of sectarian bigotry. After the lapse of a century, there have arisen in this city more than a score of churches holding the faith of Jesse Lee; their taper spires point heavenward, and their bells ring an unbroken peal of joyful triumph. To-day the University founded by this powerful and wealthy denomination to meet all the requirements of New England culture, recognizes homœopathy in its Department of Medicine. In this fateful union, we behold the flowing together of two streams for the healing of the nation, — the bridal of two reformations.

This college that we seek to endow, springs into being like the fabled creations of Eastern romance. But its foundations are historic, and are sunk deep in the three hills of a city known in all the world as the birthplace of civil and intellectual freedom; known widely also for its generosity, which is commensurate only with its gathered wealth. In this city we purpose to establish, not a feeble and ephemeral school, pinched with want and riven with internal dissensions, but one that is rich in means, ample in curriculum, and liberal in policy, a credit alike to homœopathy and the University whose name it bears.

And for this Society, it only remains to go forward, cherishing ever the true law of cure, welcoming the fellowship of all good physicians of either sex, renouncing the errors of the past, loyal to the principles of our departed leaders, and firm in our demands for justice. Truth shall bear the victory.

